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The Amateurs

Raymond M. Robinson

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

THE AMATEURS

A Burlesque in One Act

By
RAYMOND M. ROBINSON



PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY

1914

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CHARACTERS

NATHANIEL MOSSBOROUGH	.					<i>a retired business man</i>
ROSALIND MOSSBOROUGH		<i>his daughter</i>
OLIVER DOUGLASS	.	.	.	.	.	<i>her fiancé</i>
HENRY DOUGLASS	.	.	.	.		<i>an old acquaintance</i>
JENKINS	.	.	.	.	.	<i>the butler</i>

Also in Evidence

THE PROMPTER

THE ORCHESTRA LEADER

A COUPLE OF STAGE HANDS

TIME OF PLAYING :—THIRTY MINUTES

Notice to Professionals

This play is published for amateur use only. Professionals are forbidden to use it except by permission of the author, who may be addressed in care of the publishers.

STORY OF THE PLAY

This is an absurd little comedy that pokes fun at the average amateur performance. The orchestra misses its cue, the curtain sticks or rises too soon, the lights go wrong, the actors forget their lines and cues, mix up their speeches and commit all the other amateur sins, to the intense amusement of the audience.

The play they give is a ridiculously burlesqued bit of melodrama. Rosalind, daughter of Nathaniel Mossborough, is about to marry Oliver Douglass, when his father turns up with an old secret and threatens Nathaniel's ruin unless bought off. He is touched by Rosalind's singing, discovers she is marrying his own son and decides not to blast their happiness.

COSTUMES

NATHANIEL MOSSBOROUGH. A portly old gentleman in cape and silk hat. His make-up is conspicuous by the white wig and side whiskers, and the Skye-terrier eyebrows.

ROSALIND. Street suit with furs and muff.

OLIVER. A straw hat and a stick.

HENRY DOUGLASS. A shabbily dressed man of middle age. The traditional stage villain, dark complexioned, drooping moustache, with a soft black hat pulled well over his eyes.

JENKINS. Butler's livery.

All the make-ups should be a little overdone.

PROPERTIES

Newspaper, a clock that will strike, lamp, box of matches, box of cigarettes, paper money, paper copy of the play, bouquet of artificial flowers.

NOTE

The idea being to burlesque an amateur performance, the supposed mistakes may be made as absurd as possible. Make them plainly and deliberately so that the audience will be sure to get the point of each. It will be found best, however, not to emphasize too much the usual amateur slowness of performance.

The Amateurs

SCENE.—*The library in NATHANIEL MOSSBOROUGH'S house. A conventional stage library—well-worn stock scenery of the green and gold variety. Doors R. and L., and a wider doorway at the back, hung with portières—any sufficiently inharmonious color will do. Assorted furniture placed about the room, including a table at the right, on which is a reading lamp fed by a cord running plainly visible to a floor plug somewhere off stage.*

(Before the curtain rises a bell rings. Silence a moment, then it is repeated. Finally the stage manager, who plays OLIVER DOUGLASS, peers from behind the curtain and calls to the orchestra leader in an audible whisper.)

OLIVER. Ready for the overture. Didn't you hear the bell? *(The orchestra finishes the overture and relapses into silence. OLIVER'S head appears again.)* Give 'em another. We ain't quite ready. Jimmy ain't made up yet. *(He withdraws and the orchestra starts again on its overture. Before it is finished the footlights flash on and the curtain rises about four feet and sticks. OLIVER heard off.)* Come on, you, pull up that curtain!

THE VOICE OF A STAGE HAND. I can't; it's stuck!

(After a few jerks the curtain rises. JENKINS is seated by the table smoking a cigarette and reading the paper. The orchestra continues its overture. JENKINS makes two or three ineffectual attempts to be heard, begins to look worried, tries to signal the leader, and finally looks off stage appealingly. OLIVER appears again and catches the conductor's eye.)

OLIVER. Shut up !

(The orchestra stops suddenly, all but the trombone, which continues alone for a couple of measures, until conscious of its prominence.)

JENKINS. Hi wish the master wouldn't smoke these beastly Turkish cigarettes. They bite my tongue so that Hi can't 'ardly get no henjoyment hout hof them. *(Reads the newspaper.)* Hm—Hi see by the hevening paper that Suffragette ran the second 'eat in two ten an' a quarter yesterday. Now if Hi'd only laid the little wager as Hi'd a mind to do, why, by now Hi'd 'a' been just so much the richer. *(Throws down the paper.)* Hi was never cut hout for a servant. Hit mortifies me so to 'ave to take horders. Hi've a proud 'eart, Hi 'ave, hunder me 'umble liver—livery. *(He rises and goes up stage, calling off in an audible voice.)* House lights haven't been turned off yet.

OLIVER *(heard off)*. Turn out the house lights. *(All the stage lights go out.)* No, no, no ! House lights ! *(House lights go out.)* Put those stage lights on again ! *(The house lights come on while the stage remains in darkness. OLIVER starts to rush across the stage in a fury. When he is half-way across, the house lights go out and the stage lights come on. OLIVER ducks back out of sight ; outside.)* Fool ! Go on !

JENKINS. Hi've a proud 'eart under me livery. *(At back.)* Hi wonder what can be keepin' the master. 'E's late to-night. Six o'clock a'ready. *(A clock outside strikes eight.)* Six o'clock a'ready, an' 'e ain't 'ere yet. Ah ! Hi must light the reading lamp. *(He approaches the lamp and scratches a match, but the stage electrician apparently beats him to it, for the lamp lights itself before JENKINS has time to apply the match.)* There, that's a bit cheerfuller.

(Enter ROSALIND MOSSBOROUGH and OLIVER.)

OLIVER. But, Rosy dear ——

ROSALIND. Don't call me Rosy ; I detest it !

OLIVER. But, dearest ——

ROSALIND. Hush, Jenkins—*(JENKINS starts as if surprised)* has papa returned from his walk yet ?

JENKINS. Not yet, my lady.

ROSALIND. Strange; what can be detaining him?
(*Sniffing.*) Jenkins, have you been smoking my father's cigarettes again?

JENKINS. Why, no — (*Removes the cigarette from his lips and tries to blow out the smoke so that it won't be seen.*) No'm.

ROSALIND. Jenkins!

JENKINS. No, m'm, I never —

ROSALIND. That will do, Jenkins.

JENKINS. Yes, m'm.

ROSALIND. You may go, Jenkins.

JENKINS. Very well, m'm.

(*He starts out door L., corrects himself and makes for the opposite door.*)

ROSALIND. Oh, Jenkins —

JENKINS (*turning back*). Yes, m'm.

ROSALIND. We dine at seven.

JENKINS. Very well, m'm. (*Going out.*)

ROSALIND. Oh, Jenkins —

JENKINS (*turning back*). Yes, m'm.

ROSALIND. If any one calls, I am out.

JENKINS. Very well, m'm. (*Going out.*)

ROSALIND. Oh, Jenkins —

JENKINS (*turning back*). Yes, m'm.

ROSALIND. I—er—er—that is all; you may go. (JENKINS remains motionless.) You may go. (JENKINS remains motionless.) You—you may go.

JENKINS (*in an aside*). That's not my cue.

ROSALIND (*becoming very nervous*). You—you —

OLIVER (*with significant emphasis*). You may go, Jenkins. (OLIVER adds force to the words with emphatic gestures. JENKINS retires reluctantly.) Dearest Rosamond—er—Rosalind, I have seen your father.

ROSALIND (*removing her hat and furs and throwing them on a chair*). You have? What did he say, tell me!

OLIVER. Well, I didn't exactly ask for your hand, you know.

(OLIVER stands his stick in the corner; it promptly falls to the floor.)

ROSALIND. You didn't?

OLIVER. No, not exactly. I made him comprehend what I was attempting to convey to him, however. I think he understands our attitude toward each other. He—he said — (He sidles toward the chair and sits on the hat. He rises quickly.) D—n!

ROSALIND (involuntarily.) Oh!

(OLIVER sits carefully on the edge of the chair.)

OLIVER. He said little, but he was extremely agreeable and oh (rising), Rosalind, my own, I know he will welcome me as his son-in-law when he realizes that we love each other so dearly.

ROSALIND. I feel sure that he will; and we will (rising) be happy with each other, won't we?

(She goes to him at the end of the speech.)

OLIVER. Happy as the day is long, my precious; happy —

ROSALIND. And you will always —

OLIVER. — happy as two humming birds in their downy nest; happy —

ROSALIND. And you will —

OLIVER. — happy as the moonbeams that rip—(groping for her hands) ripple on the tiny wavelets; happy as —

ROSALIND. And you —

OLIVER. — as the violets, sleeping in their mossy dells, my sweetheart.

(An expectant pause; then ROSALIND, suddenly recognizing her cue, shouts.)

ROSALIND. And you will always love me, won't you?

OLIVER. Forever and ever.

(They embrace. Enter HON. NATHANIEL MOSSBOROUGH.)

NATHANIEL. Ahem!

(The lovers separate, after ROSALIND disentangles her hair from OLIVER'S scarf-pin.)

ROSALIND. Oh, is it you, daddy?

(NATHANIEL *removes his cape and hat and holds them for the butler to take. The butler is missing.*)

NATHANIEL. I am not late for dinner. I hope I was detained. Has any one called?

(NATHANIEL *has no very intelligent conception of the meaning of his lines, although he tries his best to be dramatic.*)

ROSALIND. No one while I have been here.

(NATHANIEL'S *arm begins to tire and he turns as if expecting to find JENKINS. Not finding him he peers off stage anxiously. JENKINS rushes on abruptly, seizes the cape, drops the hat, recovers it and rushes out.*)

NATHANIEL. I expected no one. Well, Jenkins, what is — Oh! (JENKINS *reënters hastily.*) Er—well, Jenkins, what is it?

JENKINS (*speaking at the same time*). Hif you please —

(*Both stop abruptly; each waits for the other to speak. After an awkward pause both start again.*)

NATHANIEL. Well, Jenkins —

JENKINS. Hif you please — (*Another abrupt stop. Then JENKINS tries once more.*) Hif you please, sir, there's a man outside wants to see you.

NATHANIEL. A man to see you? Er—see me? Who is he?

JENKINS. 'E wouldn't give 'is name, sir. Said it was hurgent.

NATHANIEL. Hurgent? Hurgent? (*He pronounces the word as if he thought it was the man's name.*) Show him in. (*Exit JENKINS. NATHANIEL sits at the table.*) Who can it be at this hour?

ROSALIND. I hope he won't stay.

NATHANIEL. Never fear, my child. You will excuse me?

(ROSALIND and OLIVER *go out L., closing the door after them. When they are gone JENKINS ushers in HENRY DOUGLASS. He turns to make sure that JENKINS has gone, then starts toward the door L. His foot lands on OLIVER'S fallen cane and he is sent sprawling on all fours. His hat*

drops off but is quickly recovered, and jammed down onto his head. HENRY points to the door L.)

DOUGLASS. Who was that?

NATHANIEL. A friend. Why do you ask?

DOUGLASS. No matter; 'twas but a passing fancy.

NATHANIEL. And now ——

DOUGLASS. You do not ask me to be seated, Nathaniel Mossborough.

NATHANIEL. You speak as though you knew me.

DOUGLASS. As though I knew you! Hah! I know you. Aye, I know you well, Nathaniel Mossborough.

NATHANIEL. Who and what are you?

DOUGLASS. You ask that, Nathaniel Mossborough?

NATHANIEL. That voice!

DOUGLASS. You recognize that voice, eh?

NATHANIEL. No, no, it cannot be —— (DOUGLASS *jerks off his hat and faces NATHANIEL across the table. A lock of red hair has slipped from under his wig.*) Henry Douglass, you!

DOUGLASS. Aye, Henry Douglass.

NATHANIEL. I thought you were dead.

DOUGLASS. I am not dead.

NATHANIEL. Why have you come to me?

DOUGLASS. Why? Because I am in trouble. I need help ——

NATHANIEL. And you expect me to give you hel ——

DOUGLASS. —— and I come to you for it.

NATHANIEL. And you expect me to give you help?

DOUGLASS. Nathaniel, years ago we were near friends. We quarreled as friends will and parted. Each went his way. You have prospered. Fortune has smiled less kindly on me. I have passed through many adventures, faced many a hardship. Nathaniel, I have returned once more to the old home town where we were boys together. I am in trouble. I ask your aid.

NATHANIEL. Explain yourself, Henry Douglass.

DOUGLASS. I cannot explain.

NATHANIEL. You cannot?

DOUGLASS. I cannot explain.

NATHANIEL. You cannot?

DOUGLASS. I cannot explain.

NATHANIEL. You—er—you ——

DOUGLASS. I cannot ex —

THE PROMPTER. Ask me nothing.

DOUGLASS (*looking inquisitively off L.*). Huh?

THE PROMPTER. Ask me nothing.

(DOUGLASS *walks across to the prompt side. The prompter repeats the line. DOUGLASS returns to his position with a relieved air.*)

DOUGLASS. Oh! Ask me nothing. I can tell you nothing.

NATHANIEL. Then how can I help you?

DOUGLASS. I must have one hundred dollars at once.

NATHANIEL. One hundred dollars!

DOUGLASS. At once.

NATHANIEL. What you ask is impossible.

DOUGLASS. Bah! Nothing is impossible to a man in your position. You must let me have it.

NATHANIEL. Must?

DOUGLASS. You dare not refuse.

NATHANIEL. Dare not! Who are you that should speak thus to me? Listen, Henry Douglass. Years ago you left me in anger. You went your way, I went mine. Now after these years you come to me to beg that which you in your shiftlessness—shiftlessness—have failed to earn honestly.

DOUGLASS. Honestly? The word brings the scurl of corn—curl of scorn—to my lip. Honestly! You speak that word who stole from my heart that which was dearest in the whole world to me—the love of a good woman.

NATHANIEL. You married another.

DOUGLASS. Aye, but the marriage that soothed the wound effaced not the scar, Nathaniel Mossborough. I need one hundred dollars. You cannot refuse me.

NATHANIEL. I do refuse you.

DOUGLASS. You mean that?

NATHANIEL. I do. (*He rises.*)

DOUGLASS. Wait. (*DOUGLASS leans across the table.*

NATHANIEL *sits down again.*) I have heard it said that you pride yourself on the fact that you founded your fortune on ten dollars.

NATHANIEL. Well?

DOUGLASS. Where did you get that ten dollars?

NATHANIEL. Whe-where?

DOUGLASS (*pointing his finger at him*). Yes, Nathaniel, where did you get that ten dollars?

NATHANIEL. I—I earned it.

DOUGLASS. You lie!

NATHANIEL. What?

DOUGLASS. Listen. It is a Sunday in June. The scene is the little village church. The sermon is over. The ushers, two young men, are taking up the collection. Near the back of the church sits a stranger, a rich traveler, who has dropped into the service. As the plate reaches him he places in it a ten dollar bill, folded small. Only two people saw the act to recognize the denomination of the bill. They were the two ushers. When the collection was counted after the service the amount was announced as four dollars and thirteen cents. Who, then, stole the ten dollars? The only person who had the opportunity to—the usher who held the plate. Nathaniel, you were that usher!

NATHANIEL. Ah! You rave!

DOUGLASS. You stole the ten dollars! I know, for I was the other usher.

NATHANIEL. You can't prove it.

DOUGLASS. Can't I? Wait. In the course of your first memorable business deal which marked the beginning of your fortune I—(*dramatically*) I got that ten dollar bill.

NATHANIEL. You!

DOUGLASS. Aye.

NATHANIEL (*tremulously*). Henry, did you give it back to the church?

DOUGLASS. I did not. I kept it for evidence. (*He produces a ten dollar bill, which he thrusts under NATHANIEL'S nose. NATHANIEL falls back in his chair, his eyes staring, panting tragically. DOUGLASS replaces the money in his pocket.*) Now will you let me have the money? Or will you have the truth spread before the public?

NATHANIEL. No!

DOUGLASS. Then I will cry out the story from the housetops.

NATHANIEL. You dare not.

DOUGLASS. I dare anything! I am a desperate man.

NATHANIEL (*in horror*). A convict?

DOUGLASS (*aside*). We ain't got to that yet.

NATHANIEL (*uncertainly*). A—a convict?

DOUGLASS (*with a desperate attempt to pick up the broken dialogue*). I—I am a convict — (He begins to back toward the prompter, still facing NATHANIEL.) I am anything I dare—I mean I dare—I — (Still keeping his eyes on the old man and talking wildly to cover his confusion DOUGLASS backs squarely into the scenery with a crash. He frantically seizes the swaying pieces to prevent their falling, while the arms of a stage hand reach out to jerk them back into place.) I—I am—I — (To the prompter.) Give me my line.

THE PROMPTER. Gosh, I've lost the place !

DOUGLASS (*loudly*). Gosh, I've lost the place — No ! The convict — (To the prompter.) What the devil comes next ?

THE PROMPTER. The police —

DOUGLASS (*suddenly*). Aye, Henry Douglass,—no—aye, Nathaniel Mossborough, I am a convict. The police are even now at my heels. Give me the money —

NATHANIEL. Never !

DOUGLASS. You defy me ?

NATHANIEL. No ! Yes !

DOUGLASS. Then by heaven —

NATHANIEL (*rising*). Leave my house !

DOUGLASS. You dare —

NATHANIEL. Leave my house ! I am an old man, but you have stirred my anger !

(NATHANIEL takes a step toward DOUGLASS. They struggle and DOUGLASS drops to the floor. When he rises one side of his moustache has fallen off, evidently without his knowledge.)

DOUGLASS. I could kill you for this !

ROSALIND (*outside*). Pa-pah !

DOUGLASS. Who was that ?

NATHANIEL. My daughter.

DOUGLASS. You have a daughter ? I must not be seen here. Hide me.

(He dives toward the door L. and crashes into OLIVER as the latter enters followed by ROSALIND. DOUGLASS hastily turns and dashes out the opposite side.)

OLIVER. I beg your pardon. I thought you spoke.

NATHANIEL. No, I—I was talking to Jenkins.

OLIVER. But Jenkins has gone out to mail a letter for me.

NATHANIEL. Yes, I sent him.

ROSALIND. Has your company gone?

NATHANIEL. Yes, quite gone, my dear, quite gone. But you must excuse me a moment longer. I ——

ROSALIND. But, papa ——

NATHANIEL. Just a moment. (*He succeeds in steering ROSALIND and OLIVER out of the room, then crosses to the opposite door where DOUGLASS went out.*) Come in, Henry Douglass.

(DOUGLASS enters by the door at the back, while NATHANIEL stands as if expecting him to enter R.)

DOUGLASS. Hum!

(NATHANIEL, startled, turns to find DOUGLASS at his elbow.)

NATHANIEL. Come in, Henry Douglass.

DOUGLASS. That young man, who was he?

NATHANIEL. A friend of my daughter's.

DOUGLASS. His name?

NATHANIEL. By a strange coincidence the same as yours, Douglass.

DOUGLASS. Is't possible! A friend of your daughter's? No more than a friend?

NATHANIEL. I might say my daughter's affianced.

DOUGLASS. Nathaniel, is not your pride sorely tried to see your daughter affianced to such a man?

NATHANIEL. Such a man?

DOUGLASS. To the son of such a man? A son of a ——

NATHANIEL. What do you mean, Henry Douglass?

DOUGLASS. A son of a ——

NATHANIEL. You know not whereof you speak. The lad's father is dead these many years.

DOUGLASS. Dead? Hah! So I am dead, am I?

NATHANIEL. You!

DOUGLASS. Aye—I. Oliver Douglass is my son.

NATHANIEL. Your son?

DOUGLASS. How proud you will be to have the world know that your daughter married the son of a convict.

NATHANIEL. No, no —

DOUGLASS. Then listen. Give me the money I ask for and I will go—far away, never to return. 'To the world I will be as one dead. Come, Nathaniel, for your daughter's sake.

NATHANIEL (*greatly perturbed*). No—no —

(DOUGLASS *walks to the back of the stage and turns at the door.*)

DOUGLASS. You still refuse?

NATHANIEL. I must.

DOUGLASS. Then, Nathaniel Mossborough, the world shall know that you are a church robber, that your daughter is the wife of the son of a thief, a fugitive, a convict! Revenge shall be mine! Upon your head shall be heaped the fires of shame and dishonor. Long have I waited for this hour, but now the flood-gates are opened to fan into flame the embers of anger that have these years slumbered in my heart. You scorn to lend a helping hand to me, an old friend. Very well. But wait! (*He turns to go.*)

NATHANIEL. Henry—Henry—you would not ruin me?

DOUGLASS. That I would. Twenty-five years ago you took the light out of my life. This night I hold the cards.

NATHANIEL. Henry—oh, Henry —

(DOUGLASS *is about to go when ROSALIND in the next room begins to sing the "Last Rose of Summer."* *He pauses and listens.*)

DOUGLASS (*his voice breaking*). 'Tis her mother's voice. (*Both men listen, motionless. As she finishes NATHANIEL breaks down and sobs on the table. DOUGLASS walks to him and touches him on the shoulder.*) Nathaniel, forgive me. The sound of that voice stirs within me all the manhood I have got left. There is no longer anger in my heart. My threats die in my throat. Henry,—I mean Nathaniel—I mean—yes, Nathaniel—I am going far away. You will never see me again. My son thinks me dead. It is better so. (*He goes to the door.*) Her mother's voice!

(*The words end in a tragic gulp as he staggers blindly off. NATHANIEL raises his head to find him gone. He struggles to his feet.*)

NATHANIEL. Henry—Henry —

(*Enter ROSALIND and OLIVER. OLIVER carries a copy of the play in which he is frantically looking for his cue. Suddenly conscious of what he is doing he passes the book to a hand which reaches out to receive it.*)

ROSALIND. Has your company gone, daddy?

NATHANIEL. Yes, my child, quite gone.

ROSALIND. Who was it?

NATHANIEL. Only an old friend, my dear.

ROSALIND. I'm glad he's gone. And may I ask Oliver to stay to dinner, daddy?

NATHANIEL. If you want him, my dear.

ROSALIND (*shyly*). I—I do want him, papa.

(*They seek each other's hands.*)

OLIVER. She says she does.

NATHANIEL. Bless you, my children. And you promise me to be good to her, Oliver?

OLIVER (*fervently*). I do!

(*The men clasp hands.*)

NATHANIEL. You will, I know. You are like your father.

OLIVER. You knew my father?

NATHANIEL. Years ago. He was a good man.

(*JENKINS enters L., finds he is in the wrong entrance, backs out and reappears at the center door.*)

JENKINS. Dinner is served.

(*The orchestra strikes up the wedding march from "Lohengrin" and ROSALIND and OLIVER march out followed by NATHANIEL and JENKINS. The curtain falls.*)

(*The curtain rises again for the encore. The members of the cast all reappear, line up and bow. The orchestra leader passes up a bunch of flowers. The actors look at each other to see who shall go for it. NATHANIEL and OLIVER start together, then each steps back to his place to allow the other to go. After a pause both start again. This time OLIVER beats NATHANIEL to the footlights and accepts the flowers, smiling and bowing to the audience.*)

THE LEADER OF THE ORCHESTRA. That ain't for you.

OLIVER (*in surprise*). Huh?

THE LEADER. It's for her. (*Points to ROSALIND.*)

OLIVER. Oh!

(*He gives the flowers to ROSALIND, who smiles and bows graciously. The curtain falls. NATHANIEL is left between the curtain and the footlights, and tries frantically to find his way back.*)

NATHANIEL. Hey! Pull up that curtain!

(*The curtain rises and NATHANIEL disappears in the wings. The actors are not expecting another curtain call. DOUGLASS is removing his wig. Scene-shifters are clearing the stage. ROSALIND is congratulating DOUGLASS.*)

ROSALIND. Say, you were perfectly grand! Oh, gee!

(*They hurriedly line up and bow as the curtain descends for the last time.*)

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